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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 000583

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DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARP, SCA, AND EEB/TRA/OTP

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TAGS: [EAIR](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: (S) UAE DETAINS US MILITARY CARGO, PERSONNEL ON RUSSIAN
PLANES

CLASSIFIED BY DCM DOUG GREENE FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

11. (U) This cable contains an action request. Please see para 16.

12. (C/NF) Summary: On June 3, the UAE authorities detained two Russian IL-76 cargo planes operated by Volga-Dnepr Airlines (VDA), which were carrying US military cargo and two US service members from Kuwait to Afghanistan. According to UAE officials, the transiting planes lacked appropriate clearance and documentation regarding their military cargo and armed US military passengers. The investigation continues; the lack of appropriate authorization is punishable under UAE civil aviation law. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

13. (C/NF) The two IL-76 Aircraft operated by Volga Dnepr Airlines (VDA) are based out of the Sharjah Free Zone. The US military Air Mobility Command (AMC) routinely awards the company contracts to carry military cargo. Many of these contracts call for delivery to Afghanistan originating in Kuwait or Iraq. On these flights the aircraft land at either Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) for crew changes and/or fuel or Fujairah for maintenance and servicing.

14. (C/NF) The routine request for diplomatic clearance to land in the UAE was handled by the US Defense Attach Office (DAO) in Abu Dhabi, who coordinates the clearances with the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). In practice, the DAO receives the request from the airline flying the mission and the airline provided details are passed to MFA who in turn passes to the UAE Armed Forces (GHQ). GHQ reviews the request and sends an approval back to MFA who transmits the approval to the DAO. The DAO provides the following information to MFA: number and nationality of crew, purpose of flight, if the aircraft is carrying ammunition, weapons or military photo electronic equipment, among other details. The number of passengers is not required unless there are VIPs involved. However, the international flight plan required to be filed prior to any flight includes the number of persons aboard the flight.

15. (C/NF) On May 25, the DAO received a request for diplomatic clearance for three aircraft making daily flights from Kuwait City International Airport to Bagram AB. The request from Volga Dnepr Airlines listed the crew as five Russians. The purpose of the flight was listed as transporting Armored Personnel Carriers. There was no mention of weapons, ammunition or photography equipment. The stated purpose of the flights was to carry Armored Personnel Carriers between the two locations supporting OEF. The DAO confirmed that the missions are being flown in support of the US Government and filed the request with MFA (note #206) on 25 May 09. On 26 May 09 the DAO received diplomatic clearance (# CON 4292) from MFA for the aircraft

to operate as requested.

CREW AND CARGO SEIZED

¶16. (C/NF) On June 3, the cargo and passengers were loaded onboard the aircraft at Kuwait and departed for the UAE. The US military provided cargo and passenger manifests to the VDA aircrews; according to accepted international civil aviation procedures, all UAE and international requirements for filing this information was the responsibility of VDA. According to second hand information received subsequently to the aircraft landing at Fujairah and RAK the aircrew did not fulfill these requirements.

¶17. (C/NF) According to the General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), the aircraft filed flight plans indicating no passengers were onboard either aircraft. The VDA cargo manifest (provided to DAO by VDA President Valery) indicates only "general military support equipment." The DAO cannot confirm any cargo manifest was filed in accordance with international procedures. Specific details on each plane are:

PLANE A - VDA 6097 (FUJAIRAH): It is unclear the numbers provided for the crew on this aircraft but the passenger count filed was zero, the two US passengers were not listed and not included in the crew numbers. It is unknown what if any cargo was listed on the flight plan. US military documents indicate the cargo was mixed military supplies and equipment.

PLANE B - VDA 6096 (RAK): The aircraft which landed at RAK listed five crew members on the flight plan (filed with the GCAA), but 13

ABU DHABI 00000583 002 OF 003

Russian crew members and 2 US passengers arrived. It is unknown what if any cargo was listed on the flight plan. US military documents indicate the cargo was mixed military supplies and equipment.

¶18. (C/NF) The US military passengers onboard the aircraft which landed at RAK deplaned the aircraft with weapons visible. According to UAE government officials, the weapons were carried on the backs of the soldiers and appeared to be unloaded. These are the personal weapons of the soldiers they will carry into combat on arrival in Afghanistan. When approached by the police the soldiers complied immediately with request to stow the weapons on board the aircraft. (Note: Accepted international procedure indicates the VDA crew should be responsible for controlling the passengers and tell them when visible weapons are appropriate. US procedures dictate no weapons will leave the aircraft until the final destination is reached. Prior to departing the aircraft, it was the responsibility of the aircrew to direct the soldiers to secure and stow the weapons. End Note.)

VDA PERSPECTIVE

¶19. (C/NF) On June 9, Defense Attache (DATT) Colonel Bret Rider met with VDA Executive President Gabriel Valeri and Commercial Sales Representative Dmitry Gridnev. (Valery flew in from Moscow and Gridnev is resident in Sharjah, where he has lived since 2002.) Valery reported the GCAA told him on June 9 that there were "minor" technical problems with the aircraft that needed to be addressed. However, Valery indicated that the real problem was the US Embassy's failure to get diplomatic clearance for the passengers and their weapons. Valery noted his crews' passports had been confiscated, illegally, by the authorities and the crew members were under house arrest in Fujairah and RAK. He told the DATT the US Army soldiers were also being detained which was not the case. He showed the DATT internal VDA paperwork that indicated the personal weapons had been stowed in a locked container. When asked why this did not happen as the paperwork indicated Valery said the soldiers did not like not having their weapons and the crews never asked just filled in the paperwork.

¶10. (C/NF) Later on June 9 the DATT received a call from Gene Redmon, who introduced himself as a retired USAF Colonel and former Air Attach who works with VDA as a consultant. The DATT explained that

his office was responsible for the aircraft diplomatic clearance and the aircrew and airline had responsibility for the passengers and cargo. Mr. Redmon later notified the DATT the aircrew had been arrested by the UAEG and the Russian Embassy was being involved.

¶11. (C/NF) Separately, a lawyer reportedly working for VDA informed State EEB/TRA/OTP that UAE officials had reported VDA was in violation of UAE civil aviation code articles 13, 14, and 70. (Note: All articles related to the authorization required to carry weapons and other dangerous materials and the punishment for failing to follow UAE regulations. End Note.) The lawyer, Mr. Glen Wicks has an appointment with the DATT and other Embassy personnel for Sunday, 14 June.

US PERSONNEL

¶12. (C/NF) On the evening of 9 June, the US soldiers in RAK reported they were questioned by police officials. The senior soldier told DATT that the questioning was conducted in a conversational and non-threatening manner. The police wanted to know the history of the cargo as he knew the history. Following the questioning an Arabic statement was produced and the soldier was asked to sign the statement, he refused. Also on June 9, Fujairah authorities requested and received the military ID cards of the two soldiers there. Additionally, the USN personnel who are hosting the soldiers report the security at the airport has visibly increased in the last 24-48 hours.

CARGO STATUS

¶13. (C/NF) The USG has requested landing clearance for two USAF C-17 aircraft to land at RAK and Fujairah in the next 24 to 72 hours, once it becomes clear that UAEG will release the cargo. The intent is to transship the cargo and passengers from the VDA aircraft to the C-17s. The cargo is needed for ongoing operations in Afghanistan and additional delays will affect the combat capabilities of the American

ABU DHABI 00000583 003 OF 003

forces in Afghanistan. The DAO has and will provide detailed cargo lists of both aircraft and will assist any and all UAE investigations (military or civilian) in this matter.

EMBASSY ACTION

¶14. (C/NF) In addition to DAO efforts, on June 8, the Ambassador called Mohammed Mubarak Al Mazroui, assistant to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, to ask for his assistance. In a follow-up conversation, Al Mazroui told the Ambassador on June 10 that the primary problem is that the Embassy's diplomatic note on the flight did not reflect the details of the flight's cargo. Al Mazroui said that the UAEG is trying to implement strict export controls - as requested by the U.S., and this is one reflection of that. The case is now being examined by Ras Al Khaimah prosecutors, and the UAE military is closely involved.

CRIMINAL CONCERNS

¶15. (S/NF) Echoing June 7 comments from Director of Military Security Brigadier General Mahash al Hameli, Al Mazroui told the Ambassador that UAEG had other concerns with Russian entities in the UAE. (Note: There is some indication Russian government entities may have smuggled weapons into the UAE in the past. End Note.) Post is aware that Volga Dnepr has been a company of interest to OFAC due to suspicion of past links to international arms trafficker Victor Bout. At one time, a local contact reported to EmbOffs that Russian cargo planes operating out of the UAE were suspected of possible involvement in drug shipments from Afghanistan to non-UAE destinations, although Volga Dnepr was not specifically identified in this regard.

ACTION REQUEST

¶16. (C/NF) Post requests TRANSCOM, and others as appropriate, review
VDA contracts, particularly regarding clearance responsibilities.
OLSON